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ABSTRACT

A practicum was designed to improve the literacy instruction of first-grade students by increasing the first grade teachers' and reading specialists' understandings of current research and theory. A graduate-level 3-hour course was developed and adopted by a local state university to assist teachers in understanding and utilizing the most current research regarding emergent literacy and early literacy. The course was designed to balance current theory and research with the practical application of the results. Teachers learned how to administer the Observation Survey and became very adept at taking a running record and analyzing it. The emphasis of the class for the teachers was on the practical application of theory and on reflection of their teaching practices. Analysis of the data revealed that the teachers were able to make shifts in their thinking and practices as evidenced by their end-of-course oral presentations. These presentations demonstrated a reading and writing unit that reflected both current theory and practice. The end-of-course evaluations were quite positive and indicated the significance of the course on their understanding of emergent literacy. (Contains 25 references and 3 tables of data. Appendixes present a checklist for evaluating running records and a scoring rubric.) (Author/RS)

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Improving the Literacy Instruction Strategies of Elementary School Teachers Through a Graduate Education Course

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A Practicum I Report Presented to the Ed.D Program in Child and Youth Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Nova Southeastern University
1995

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APPROVAL PAGE

This practicum took place as described.

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This practicum report was submitted by Anna Rebecca Clay Faulkner under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed. D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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Abstract

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This practicum was designed to improve the literacy instruction of first grade students by increasing the first grade teachers' and reading specialists' understandings of current research and theory. A graduate level course was developed by the writer and adopted by a local state university to assist teachers in understanding and utilizing the most current research regarding emergent and early literacy.

The writer developed and taught the graduate level 3 hour course for first grade teachers and reading specialists. The course was designed to balance current theory and research with the practical application of the results. Teachers learned how to administer the Observation Survey and became very adept at taking a running record and analyzing it. The emphasis of the class for the teachers was on the practical application of theory and on reflection of their teaching practices.

Analysis of the data revealed that the teachers were able to make shifts in their thinking and practices as evidenced by their end of course oral presentations. These presentations demonstrated a reading and writing unit that reflected both current theory and practice. The end of course evaluations were quite positive and indicated the significance of the course on their understanding of emergent literacy.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Description of Community

The writer's community is located along a major interstate highway corridor. Within one hundred miles in either direction of the interstate, two of the country's major metropolitan areas are found. Easy access to the large metropolitan areas and to the interstate system make this community an ideal setting to locate both national and international industries. The community covers 789 square miles and is comprised of urban, suburban, and rural areas. The community has a population of approximately 320,000 people with the Metropolitan Statistical Area population listed at more than 833,000 ("Community Information," 1994/1995).

Nestled in the foothills of a mountain range, the community affords many recreational opportunities year round. The mountains are reached in less than an hour and the coastal area of the state are reached in less than four hours. The climate is moderate with four distinct seasons of the year. The climate and geographic location coupled with the economic development of the area make this a rapidly growing community.

The community is experiencing the lowest unemployment figures in the entire region. The area is economically very stable. Property taxes have not risen drastically as often happens in other areas with similar economic growth. The county-wide school system is funded by property taxes. However, the School Board does not have fiscal autonomy and has to request an increase in millage from the state legislators representing the county. Additionally, the community is governed by a system of both a City and a County Council.

Description of Work Setting

The writer's large county-wide school system has approximately 63,000 students. The

black to white ratio is the same as the county-wide population: Approximately 78:20. The remaining population consists of a variety of students of European, Hispanic, and Oriental descent. Most of the students reside outside the city limits in both suburban and rural areas. The community is under court-ordered busing to achieve integration of its schools. The school district strives to provide equality for all of its students. Students may request attendance in a school of their choice out of their attendance area and permission is granted as long as racial guidelines are met. The district has established a series of magnet schools to attract suburban and rural students to attend the urban schools.

Over five thousand teachers and support staff are employed by the school district. The district is the largest employer in the county. The racial and ethnic ratio for employees is the same as that for the student body. The school district consists of 54 elementary schools, 13 middle schools, 14 high schools, and four vocational schools.

The community offers a great deal of support to the schools through business partnerships. The business partnerships offer financial assistance through various grants and equipment donations. Businesses and civic groups are very active in volunteer programs within the schools. The school district employs a Business Partnership Coordinator to facilitate the vast numbers of programs and to disseminate the information to the schools and to the community.

Besides the large public school program, the community also offers several church-sponsored private schools. The community is also home to one of the largest and most famous independent religious universities in the country. Many students are being home-schooled within the community. Because property taxes are used to fund the public schools, the public schools have to be sensitive to the varied opinions of the residents of the community when developing a

new curriculum. The School Board itself consists of one member whose children attend a private church-sponsored school. Curriculum changes initiated by the administration have to be approved by the School Board and many changes are written and mandated by the Board. Many School Board meetings last into the early morning hours with many parents and county residents slated to speak on a variety of issues. Making necessary changes within the school district is difficult both because of the size of the district and the diversity of the community.

Writer's Role

The writer was born and educated in this community. A major private university and a major state university are located within proximity of this community. The writer has an undergraduate degree in elementary education from the private university. The writer has a Masters of Education in Reading degree from the state university. The writer also has a Masters plus 30 graduate hours (Specialist's Certification) in Elementary Supervision and Administration. The writer is a member of many civic and professional organizations. The writer is a member of an honorary educational sorority and is named to Who's Who in American Education on three separate occasions.

The writer has been employed in this school district for 25 years. The first four years of employment were spent as a fourth grade teacher in a suburban middle income elementary school. The writer's second position, which lasted 16 years, was that of a Reading Specialist in a variety of schools. For the last five years, the writer has been employed as a Reading Recovery^{R} Teacher Leader. The district employed a total of three Teacher Leaders.

Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders receive 18 hours of specialized training from a regional training site. The position of Reading Recovery Teacher Leader involves a variety of

duties and responsibilities. A duty of the Teacher Leader is to train 8-12 new Reading Recovery teachers in a year long graduate program through the local state university. So besides working full-time for the local school district, the Teacher Leader is also employed by the university as an adjunct professor. Teacher Leaders conduct a minimum of six site visits with the teachers-in-training. Once a teacher completes Reading Recovery training, annual site visits by the Teacher Leaders are still required to maintain certification. The previous school year, the Teacher Leaders trained a total of 24 new teachers and supervised 43 trained Reading Recovery teachers in this district and four surrounding districts.

Not only do Teacher Leaders train and supervise Reading Recovery teachers, but they must also teach a minimum of two at-risk first time first graders on a daily basis. The writer is housed in the Reading Recovery training site for the school district. The training site is located in an inner-city, elementary school.

The three Teacher Leaders are responsible for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data that is then reported to the National Diffusion Network center at Ohio State University. Using this data, Teacher Leaders write an annual site report distributed to the administration, the School Board, the State Department of Education, the regional training site, and the National Diffusion Network.

Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders conduct a variety of workshops and presentations. Teacher Leaders conduct Reading Recovery awareness sessions for new administrators and school faculties. Teacher Leaders also conduct workshops throughout the district for regular classroom teachers and administrators in reading strategies and theories. The writer has been involved in numerous presentations to the School Board concerning the total reading program and

Reading Recovery. Numerous presentations have been given to PTA groups, community and civic groups, and teacher organizations. The writer has attended and made presentations at local, state, regional, and international reading conferences.

Chapter II: Study of the Problem

Problem Statement

The problem to be solved in this practicum was the discrepancy between reading instruction in K-5 grades and current research and theory. In short, the reading instruction in grades K-5 did not reflect current research and theory. Teachers were continuing to teach the same way they had always taught. Although there was a wealth of new information available to teachers, their current practices did not indicate theoretical shifts.

Problem Description

In the writer's school district, an attempt had been made to switch from a basal reader approach in reading instruction to a whole language approach. Unfortunately, the definition of whole language varied as widely as there were teachers attempting to use it. Often, the building principal decided that whole language sounded like a really good idea and mandated the philosophy for the school without first understanding the theory and research. In many schools, teachers were still attempting to teach reading with outdated basal readers and with little or no accommodations for the individual needs of their students. Since these teachers were following the teacher's edition to the basal, they felt that they were doing an adequate job. If we expected to raise test scores and prepare our students for the next century, an "adequate job" was neither realistic nor desirable.

In working with the Reading Recovery program, the writer had found that one difficulty encountered by at-risk first graders was the lack of a supportive classroom. Instead of accelerating these students, the teachers slowed their instruction. Consequently, by the end of first grade these students were even further behind their peers than when they started. Equally

frustrating was the lack of adequate literacy instruction by the kindergarten teachers. Students received little or no instruction at the pre-emergent and emergent stages of reading and writing. Little attention was given to print conventions, sound-letter correspondences, reading, and writing. Teachers in the elementary schools viewed reading and writing as separate entities with little or no correlation between the two processes. Reading and writing were taught as separate subjects with many teachers viewing writing only within the framework of creative writing done infrequently, if at all. Most teachers viewed literacy learning from a scope and sequence perspective. Students moved through the basal levels as they demonstrated mastery on criterion-referenced tests published by the book publishers. Failure to master a level meant that the student repeated that level until mastery could be obtained. Students lagging far behind their peers at the end of the year were automatically retained. The next year in the same grade found those same retained students receiving the same type of instruction as the previous year's. This pattern of teach/test/pass/fail was repeated throughout many schools. Little thought was given to how to improve the literacy instruction of elementary students to ensure their success early in school. Blame was placed on the students' lack of readiness for the grade.

Students deemed most at-risk were placed in remedial programs in first grade. Most of these remedial programs were taught by paraprofessionals. In other words, the most needy children were placed with the least prepared and trained teachers. In reality, all students suffered from inadequate literacy instruction. Even the bright students were not highly motivated and challenged. The true purposes of reading and writing escaped the average and brightest students. Literacy instruction was reduced to workbook pages, skillsheets, and little or no application of the skills taught. It was no wonder that the vast majority of students preferred not to read or write

independently.

Each time a teacher retained a child or referred a child to special education, the teacher was saying that he or she did not know how to teach this student. In rare cases of extreme mental retardation or learning disabilities, this was true. However, the volume of referrals for special education indicated to the writer that most of these students wee educationally disabled. Teachers needed more than a two-hour or two-day workshop to make the systemic changes that were necessary. Until now, workshops had been about the only ways teachers had been assisted in making changes in their literacy programs. Local universities had lagged behind themselves in making changes in the ways they prepared pre-service teachers or trained teachers in literacy development. Teachers were not being equipped with the theory and research so that they felt empowered. Too many ideas and mandates were thrown at teachers with little or no assistance in achieving success.

Problem Documentation

Classroom observations conducted by the writer showed that teacher practices involving the literacy development of their students did not reflect current research about effective instruction. Reading Recovery teachers were required to conduct classroom visits to observe their students. The students needed to have the necessary survival skills to maintain an average literacy level once they were released from Reading Recovery. Because Reading Recovery teachers spent a good deal of time observing in first grade classes, many were very disturbed at the observations that they made concerning the overall literacy instruction of these classes. One duty of the Reading Recovery teacher was to reconcile the student's classroom instruction with his Reading Recovery instruction and often that job was monumental. Much of the Reading

Recovery training class and continuing contact for trained Reading Recovery teachers was spent sharing ideas with colleagues on ways to bridge these gaps. Reading Recovery could not teach children to read by itself; it worked only with good classroom instruction. Because the two worked so closely, it was easy to identify weaknesses in either program. Additionally, the Reading Recovery students' progress was followed throughout elementary school. Questionnaires for the classroom teacher and testing of the students' reading and writing were given at the end of the year by a Reading Recovery teacher. When the student was reading on an eighth grade level, as determined by a Running Record, and the classroom teacher had the child in a remedial second grade reader, for example; the classroom teacher was not adequately teaching or assessing her students. Unfortunately, this was the case more often than not.

During an earlier workshop for 25 classroom teachers, the DeFord (1985) Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) was administered. The resulting mean score of 82.61 out of a possible score of 140 showed an emphasis on isolated skills instruction by those teachers. If teachers were using an integrated curriculum supported by the most current research, then their scores should have fallen around 110. The discrepancy was very apparent.

Through conversations with classroom teachers and in response to comments made on the Reading Recovery end of year questionnaire, there was an obvious desire to make changes in the way that they instructed their students. For example, in the 1994-1995 end of year questionnaire distributed to 131 classroom teachers of Reading Recovery students in this district, eight teachers responded with additional comments not requested on the form. These teachers added that they wished to receive training using strategies and more innovative approaches in their own classrooms. The important thing to remember was that these comments were unsolicited. These

same types of comments appeared on all of the preceding years' evaluations as well. Teachers saw the value of an intensive retraining program such as the one utilized in Reading Recovery. They understood the value of peer support in shifting their understanding and practices.

Another indication of the need and willingness of teachers to make changes occurred during the 1995 Winter Seminar in-service day conducted by the school district. The writer offered a three-hour workshop on Reading Recovery strategies and the New Zealand classroom that was filled when it was posted. There were many workshops throughout the district offered at the same time. Many teachers later told the writer that they had attempted to enroll in this workshop because of its nature but were unable to do so. They requested that it be offered again. They also showed a willingness to enroll in a graduate level course of that nature if one were ever offered.

As test scores continued to plummet in this district and with the school board demanding more accountability, teachers were going to be under increased pressure to raise the standards in their classrooms. As teachers realized that perhaps there were more effective ways of teaching all students, as evidenced by the success of Reading Recovery, more would be interested in receiving an intensive retraining in literacy education.

Causative Analysis

As the philosophy of "whole language" began to appear in the late 1980's, many teachers jumped on the bandwagon without actually understanding the theory behind the concept. Teachers in this district were mandated by their principals to become whole language teachers virtually overnight. In her book, Invitations, Regie Routman (1991) says that it takes many years to become a whole language teacher. In a speech made at the International Reading

Association Annual meeting in Anaheim, California in May of 1995, Routman said that she now believed that it took a *minimum* of ten years. In their rush to embrace whole language, teachers failed to incorporate necessary skill instruction into the curriculum. The statement: "I don't teach phonics; I teach whole language," was an example of the confusion felt by many classroom teachers. Not only had teachers been forced to use methods and philosophies that they did not understand; they had adapted them into their classroom curriculum with little or no support to ensure their success. With little or very limited in-service support, these teachers had very little success with implementation. Both the teachers and the students suffered. Their approaches were much too haphazard to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Further complicating the problem was the fact that more students were coming to school ill-prepared for the demands and expectations of teachers who were equally unprepared to meet their needs. The power of the Reading Recovery program lay in the strong research base that said that we must take students where we find them and build upon their strengths rather than their weaknesses. For so long, we had tested and taught to the children's weaknesses, areas where the children had little or no knowledge. Research showed that children learned best by moving both from the known to the unknown and from the whole to the part. Most of the teachers today had been trained to do just the opposite. They taught to the deficit and in isolated segments. Additionally, teachers had little or no training in the developmental stages of reading, writing, and spelling. Students were not allowed to move naturally from one stage to the next in a school environment that supported its students on a continuum of learning.

Traditionally, kindergarten had been viewed as a preparation for school. Froebel envisioned a learning through play atmosphere in his German kindergartens that filtered into the

American system. Unfortunately, the evolution to the present day kindergarten had changed dramatically. In some schools, kindergarten was seen as a play atmosphere with the emphasis being placed on preparation for school. For the majority of school children, the reality was that they had participated in three and four year old preschool programs and did not need another year of preparation for school. The extreme situation was one in which five year olds were treated as though they were on a rigid academic tract with no regard for developmentally appropriate practices. Kindergarten needed to be regarded as school, not preparation for school. The curricula utilized should have reflected current research and theory regarding the most effective ways to teach these young learners. Kindergarten teachers must have artfully instructed students with appropriate methods that allowed for individual differences, but reached the literacy goals for all children. Strengthening and helping kindergarten teachers to understand how to instruct their students would help to increase the odds for success in subsequent years. If literacy development for students was seen as a continuum beginning in kindergarten, it would lead to the inclusion of kindergarten teachers in all aspects of training received by the other teachers in a school. Kindergarten would no longer be viewed as a separate entity apart from the elementary school.

The causes for the lack of adequate literacy instruction in the writer's school district were varied. Teachers were more than willing to make changes if they felt that they would be treated as professionals. If they were armed with the research and theory, they felt empowered in their decision making. The problems cited were not unique to the writer's district but were, in fact, prevalent throughout most of the United States. Even in New Zealand, which had one of the highest literacy rates in the world, the country went through a total retraining of its teachers in the 1970's. Until the teachers were all working from the same theoretical base, systemic change

could not occur. As is the case today in our country, the university training for both pre-service and trained teachers has lagged far behind the current research. This lack of adequate preparation and the reluctance of most universities to make changes added additional burdens to school systems trying to make changes in their literacy instruction.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Current research supported the writer's conclusion that the problem was widespread and that teachers wee in need of support. Teachers are the keys to changing our elementary schools as reported by Allington and Walmesley (1995). Just as important as the teachers is the idea of perfecting the art of teaching (Smith, 1992). By perfecting the art of teaching, we empower teachers to make the decisions crucial to the success of their students. As Regie Routman (1991) reports, teachers are trained in methodology but they are not trained in the ability to think and to trust themselves as practitioners. J. David Cooper (1993) reported that teachers' underlying fears of failure or inadequacy played a crucial role in the success of their literacy programs.

This lack of confidence and feelings of inadequacy began at the pre-service stage. Even new teachers are not able to put into practice what they were taught in college because it was never modeled for them by their professors (Schuman & Relihan, 1990). Teacher preparation is woefully lacking in other areas of literacy training as well. In developing an understanding of strategies in low-achieving students, Duffy (1993) found that the pre-service teachers are not adequately prepared to teach those understandings. In the relatively new area of understanding and accommodating learning styles, teacher preparation is also very weak or nonexistent. Marie Carbo (1987) reports that due to inadequate teacher training, substantial numbers of students' learning styles were not being accommodated and their literacy levels remained low. If teacher

empowerment begins at the pre-service level, then teacher reflection becomes an integral part of teacher training (Tama & Peterson, 1991). Once pre-service and trained teachers begin to reflect, then it is the university's obligation to build upon that self-awareness. Duckworth (1991) notes that it is far more productive to value the knowledge teachers bring with them and then to develop it. The same principle holds true for any new learning. It is learned far more quickly if the new learning is an extension of ideas that are already in the learner's repertoire.

Another reason that teachers had so much difficulty improving their literacy instruction was that they had trouble linking research to practice. They may have been excellent practitioners, but they could not make their instruction meet the needs of all of their students. Vice versa, they may have had the theory, but were unable to put this theory into practice. In their book, Dancing with the Pen, Griffiths, Duncan, Ward, Hood, Hervey, and Bonalleack (1992) wrote that teachers do not understand the link between reading and writing and have trouble understanding how to put theory into practice. Donald Graves (1983) refers to the teaching of writing as an integral part of the reading process but notes that teachers are unsure of how to write themselves and thus have a very difficult time instructing children in the writing process. As important as the reading and writing links are to successful literacy programs; the link between oral language and early literacy is equally vital. Taylor (1989) reports that the links between how the young child learns oral language and how he learns to read are inseparable, but the traditional teacher is unable to make this link for children. Further complicating the problem is the lack of understanding by the teachers of young children's developmental stages of reading, writing, and spelling. Dorothy Strickland (1987) notes that though the research on how young children learn has moved away from the readiness idea to that of the emergent literacy concept, few early

childhood teachers have an understanding of emergent literacy.

As teachers become familiar with the developmental stages of reading, they begin to shift their thinking about the grouping of students, retention, and many other related areas. These shifts are crucial to the rethinking and restructuring of the schools. At issue are not only the methods to use but how to integrate all of the methods to reach all students (Cunningham, 1991). The emphasis falls on developmentally appropriate practices for young children and early intervention. Slavin, Karweit, and Wasik (1992/1993) write that we have the know how to effect changes in our early childhood curriculum that would prevent school failure and we have to help teachers to make those changes. With urgency, Nancy Larrick (1987) reports that the number of illiterate adults is rising in the United States and calls for teachers to make changes in the books and methods they use to teach elementary students. Over the last 30 years, we have come to realize that we now have the know how to teach language arts effectively (Putnam, 1994). At issue now is how best to achieve the goal of literacy for all.

McGill-Franzen and Allington (1991) report that the existing money allocated to teach children to be literate is adequate, but that it must be reallocated for effective programs with strong research bases. Additionally, teacher support is crucial to the success of such programs. In examining the New Zealand classroom literacy models, Goldenberg (1991) shows the strong link between teacher support and training and the literacy acquisition of their students.

The reasons for teachers' lack of theoretical shifts regarding literacy instruction were complex. As the research showed, the problem began with pre-service teachers and was exacerbated as these new teachers moved into non-supportive schools. Although the money was there to effect change, we were not taking advantage of the opportunities. In order for teachers

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to avail themselves of such training, they must first have felt valued. Once given respect with realistic time for preparation and reflection, teachers would make the necessary theoretical shifts.

Chapter III: Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments

Goals and Expectations

The writer envisioned K-5 elementary teachers using the most current research and theory to drive their literacy instructional practices. The expectation was for all teachers within a given elementary school to be working from the same theoretical base to ensure continuity in the language arts program for all students in that school. The result of such instruction would reduce the number of retentions and special education referrals. The expectation was that the literacy acquisition of all students would be increased thus reducing the need for costly remedial programs. Through the empowerment of teachers, the general expectation was to improve the literacy instruction for all students.

Expected Outcomes

The following outcomes were projected for 15 teachers selected to participate in this practicum:

1. TORP scores for 12 out of 15 teachers will increase by at least eight points.

2. Teachers will be asked to state their theory of reading at the beginning and at the end of implementation. By the end of the implementation period, it is expected that 12 out of 15 teachers' responses will reflect the current theory and research. An assessment of their theoretical shifts will be made using a rubric for scoring.

3. Teachers will be asked to turn in a copy of their typical daily schedule in the beginning of implementation and again at the end. By the end of the implementation period, it is expected that 12 out of 15 teachers' schedules will reflect the current research on time spent in

literacy activities throughout the day. A rubric will be used to assess the relationship between theory and practice.

4. Teachers will be asked to prepare and present a reading/writing project that reflects an understanding of current theory and research. Based upon a rubric, 12 out of 15 teachers will show substantial evidence of understanding of the reading process.

5. Teachers will be required to take weekly running records of reading over a period of three months for four students. It is expected that 12 out of 15 teachers can evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their students and to then write paragraphs describing these strengths and weaknesses. These records and evaluations will be evaluated for accuracy in scoring and interpretation using a checklist.

Measurement of Outcome

Diane DeFord's TORP was designed to assess teachers' theoretical orientations to literacy. Teachers answered the questions using a Likert Scale that rated answers from one (Strongly Agree) to five (Strongly Disagree). A score of 110 or higher would show a preference for an integrated or whole language approach to literacy instruction. Thus a score of 110 would be a goal for all teachers since this type of approach is theoretically and research based.

A copy of the rubric used for scoring the essay question, the daily schedule, and the reading/writing project may be found in the appendix. On a scale of zero to three, teachers were evaluated indicating a range of understanding of theoretical principles. Zero suggested little or no understanding and three suggested substantial evidence. Both the essay question, "What is Reading?", and the daily schedules were evaluated at the beginning and at the end of implementation. Then, pre and post scores for each individual were compared to determine if

shifts have occurred. The reading/writing project was evaluated at the end of implementation only.

The checklist for evaluating running records may also be found in the appendix of this paper. This checklist consists of necessary components of an accurate evaluation, accuracy of mathematical calculations, and correctness of the procedure. As teachers became more adapt at taking running records, it was expected that the checklist would reflect the accuracy of the teachers' evaluations.

Chapter IV: Solution Strategy

Statement of Problem

The problem to be solved in this practicum was the discrepancy between reading instruction in the K-5 grades and current research and theory. In short, the reading instruction in grades K-5 did not reflect current research and theory. Teachers were continuing to teach the same way they had always taught. Although there was a wealth of new information available to teachers, their current practices did not indicate theoretical shifts.

Discussion

The literature supported basic changes in the way in which we train new teachers and in the way we conduct in-service for trained teachers. There were common underlying themes indicated from a perusal of the professional literature. All of the authors pointed to the need for teachers to understand the current theory and research as it pertains to literacy acquisition. Regie Routman (1991) talks about the need to change the college instruction of pre-service and graduate level teachers. Teachers as students need modeling to facilitate understanding. College professors need to allow students a choice of textbooks from a variety of sources. Teachers need to be allowed opportunities to learn from their colleagues. Time for thoughtful reflection must be allowed. Retraining of teachers cannot be a one-shot deal. Teachers require long-term support to make theoretical shifts in their thinking and practices. Routman also recommends several commercial staff development programs that she felt duplicated the current research findings. All of the recommended programs used videos and colleague interactions for their basic formats. Some were modeled after the Reading Recovery model of teacher in-service and training.

Pinnell (1994) discusses using the Reading Recovery model for teacher training to provide

literacy training for classroom teachers as well. The strong colleague support and modeling by a teacher leader are two of the strengths of this type of teacher training. Another powerful component of this type of training is the chance for teachers to observe each other in actual teaching situations. Then the teachers dialogue and problem solve ways to improve the teaching. This decision making component eventually leads to the empowerment of teachers. Rosow (1995) calls for the empowerment of both teachers and students to achieve maximal literacy learning. Empowerment leading to the teacher's decision-making and to the student's self-esteem was required to achieve real literacy.

All of the solutions discussed thus far deserved a closer look. The overwhelming drawback to each solution, however, was funding. Where does a school district receive adequate funding to retrain its teachers or to influence training at the university level? Most school districts operate on a shoestring budget that does not allow for staff development. Teachers must pay for their own courses and workshops. Although this method does work, the teachers who need the inservice the most are the least likely to pay for it themselves. Allington and Walmesley (1995) recommends allocating 1.5 percent of every school board budget for the retraining of teachers. This money would be set aside each fiscal year just as capital improvement money is allocated. If teachers feel that the administration supports them trying to improve the literacy instruction of all students, then teachers are less resistant to change. Putting your money where your mouth is more than just a cliche. It validates teachers as professionals.

Several options were available to the writer to solve this problem. The writer could have proposed to train as a facilitator for one of the already established literacy training workshops. This would have involved some initial expense that would be saved by having a trainer in the

school district. However, the writer would most likely have to be away from the district for the training. Additionally, some flexibility to adapt the program to meet the needs of this school district could be lost.

Another option would have been to run a series of workshops designed by the writer to shift the teaching practices of the classroom teachers. To effect significant change, however, these workshops would have been held over a long period with a great deal of follow-up. Teachers would actually have spent as much time in the workshops as they would in a regular graduate course. Without a stipend, teachers would have been very reluctant to give up their free time after contract hours to attend a long series of workshops.

A third option was to contact a local university and make a proposal for a new course to be run either as a regular graduate course or as a contract course. The expectation was that through submitting a thoughtful syllabus for consideration, the university would realize that their regular courses were falling short in this category of instruction. Universities, however, were sometimes reluctant to allow contract courses to be run for fear that these courses would draw students from their regularly offered courses. Convincing a local university to hire the writer as an adjunct instructor could prove to be difficult. The writer, as a Reading Recovery Teacher Leader, was already employed as an adjunct professor by the local state university. This university only allowed adjunct instructors to teach one off-campus course each semester. Two options for the writer would then be available: Convince the local private university to allow the writer to teach a contract course or convince the local state university to wave the one course stipulation.

If a graduate course or a series of workshops were offered for teachers in this district, two

possible funding sources would be the Business Partnership and The Alliance for Quality Education programs. These programs offered grants that were funded through local businesses. The competition was very keen for the limited funds so the grant proposal had to be ingenious. Other sources of grant funding would have to be considered. Time then became a crucial factor.

Description of Selected Solutions

The writer wished to develop a course for K-5 classroom teachers that would teach current reading theory and practice. The graduate level course was offered as a three-hour graduate course through a local university. The course was proposed to the school district administration as one solution to the general problem of improving literacy instruction for elementary students in this district. The writer planned to contact school board members to discuss the plan for the course and to issue an invitation for board members to visit the class. To get approval from a local university, the writer submitted a proposal and proposed outline indicating the need for such a course. The writer hoped that the discrepancy between what was already offered and what needed to be offered could be addressed in a non-threatening manner.

Beyond the course offering, the writer planned to be available for classroom visits to help the teachers in the application of the procedures and theories covered in the course. The writer also provided model lessons for teachers. Teachers were to be allowed to choose from several texts. The information given in class was a compilation of all of the latest research and theory with the textbooks acting as teacher resources. Additional follow-up visits after the completion of the course were encouraged.

The writer planned to organize a local professional organization dedicated to supporting teachers as they strive to make theoretical shifts. Change occurs gradually. If teachers do not

receive continued colleague support, they will revert to old ways. The empowerment and reflection must be ongoing. As new research is reviewed and new procedures reported, teachers need to be kept abreast of this information. The support group would help to keep teachers informed and would offer a forum for teachers to report their own discoveries.

Report of Action Taken

The writer began negotiations with the nearby state university at the beginning of the school year. The Chair of the Elementary Education Department was the person to whom the syllabus was sent. The Chair had two concerns: First, she was afraid that the contract course would detract teachers from the off-campus Masters' Degree in reading program she was trying to establish and, secondly, she was concerned about the choice of textbooks chosen for the course. The writer asked if there was a possibility of counting this course as a transfer course into the Masters' Degree program. The writer offered to revise the syllabus to meet university requirements. The Chair agreed to allow this course to transfer as a basic methods course in the Masters' Degree in Reading program. The writer asked the Chair which textbooks she thought would be more appropriate for this course and she suggested two that the writer was already using for reference. It was agreed that the two textbooks would be Allington and Walmesley's No Quick Fix: Rethinking Literacy Programs in America's Elementary Schools, and Allington and Cunningham's Classrooms That Work: They Can All Read and Write.

Once verbal agreement was given to offer the course, an announcement was prepared for all 54 elementary schools in the writer's district. The Superintendent for Elementary Education in the writer's district became interested in the program and decided to train all first grade teachers and reading specialists in the district. The Superintendent offered to pay the contract price to the

university and supply the textbooks to the teachers. Suddenly the proposed class enrollment went from 15 to the maximum 25 teachers enrolled in the course. A waiting list was formed to take care of the first grade teachers who could not get into the course and for the upper grade teachers who wished to enroll.

On the day of the first class, one of the teachers enrolled in the course called and withdrew her name from the class. The first teacher on the waiting list was called and was able to attend the class that afternoon. One teacher who attended the first two classes was forced to withdraw due to the need for emergency surgery that took her out of school for the remainder of the first semester of school. Thus, the total number of teachers was 24 for the remainder of the course.

To finish the course by December, the end of first semester for the university, the writer offered 12 class sessions three and three quarters hours each. The first class went as planned with the administration of the TORP and the essay questions. The writer was only able to get through the first three tests in the Observation Survey rather than the planned five sections. Week two went smoothly with a completion of the Observation Survey and the introduction to running records. Week three included a review of running records and the introduction of the analysis of running records and reading strategies and prompts. The writer found that the class was not ready to turn in four individual running records for analysis and that assignment was postponed until more practice could be given. The teachers were asked to turn in the first five tests of the Observation Survey on two students. Week four marked the beginning of weekly practices with the running record using an audiotape of a student reading aloud. This proved to be very helpful for the class as the instructor actually took the same running record on the overhead for the class to check after the tape was finished. In week four, the writer got behind with the activities

planned and on the syllabus. There was too much material to be covered. With the necessary addition of the weekly running record practice, the syllabus had to be revised somewhat. Two of the videos planned for weeks four and five were omitted. Weeks six and seven consisted of working with Big Books and the aspects of shared and guided reading and writing. Just as the writer suspected, the first grade teachers were very uncertain of how to effectively use Big Books. Much discussion and clarification was necessary. Weeks eight and nine consisted of playing catch up as the writer had gotten behind in the syllabus again. Often class discussions would take up more time than the writer had planned. By the ninth week, however, the weekly running record practice had proven to be time well spent as the teachers began to demonstrate and reflectively discuss a clear understanding of the process and analysis. With the change in textbooks, it was necessary to devote the end of week ten and most of week 11 to the activities and methodology discussed in the Allington and Cunningham book: Classrooms that Work: They Can All Read and Write. The writer obtained a video that was very helpful in demonstrating the procedures. However, the video was quite long and most of the spelling activities and the classroom management activities the writer had planned had to be forgotten. The Cunningham four blocks took precedence over the previously planned activities. Because of the size of the class, it was necessary to devote most of the class time in weeks 11 and 12 to the oral presentations of the teachers. Class 12 also consisted of the readministration of the TORP, and a short essay exam.

The members were given a syllabus with a tentative topical schedule the first night of the class. The syllabus also included the reading assignments for each week. The writer found it was helpful and necessary to include not only the running record practice each week but also to have a reading reflection time at the beginning of each class to clarify or expand on the reading

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assignments. The writer attempted to accommodate a variety of learning styles by offering lecture, discussion, small group activities, audio and video tapes, and a number of various activities to go with the concepts. The teachers particularly responded to the modeling done by the writer of the various activities and methods. Each night the writer selected a number of new children's books to share as read alouds to the class. The read alouds shared two purposes: To expose the teachers to new literature, and to model the power of reading aloud. After the first few classes, the teachers began bringing new books they had found to share with the class.

The class culminated with oral presentations done by the teachers. Each teacher was allotted ten minutes for the reading and writing presentation. Some teachers went over the ten minutes and some went under the ten minutes so that it evened out by the end of the class. The teachers' presentations had to represent a reading and writing project suitable for use in their classrooms that reflected both current theory and allowed for the various developmental stages of their students. It would have been helpful to have examples for the teachers. This assignment made the teachers very anxious and uncertain. It was difficult for the writer to be very specific about this assignment because the writer felt that each teacher should design something that would be useful for her and that would make each one different. No one format would be helpful for every teacher. Providing one or two outlines of what was expected would have been helpful.

Chapter V: Results

Results

The writer envisioned first grade teachers and reading specialists using themost current research and theory to drive their literacy instructional practices. The expectation was for all teachers to be working from the same theoretical base to ensure continuity. The literacy acquisition of all students would be increased thus reducing the need for costly remedial programs. Through the empowerment of teachers, the general expectation was to improve the literacy instruction for all students.

The following outcomes were projected for the 15 teachers selected to participate in this practicum.

1. TORP scores for 12 out of 15 teachers will increase by at least eight points.

This outcome was not met.

First of all, the class consisted of 24, not 15, teachers. Three teachers did not turn in their TORP's at the last class so the analysis is for 22 teachers in all. Of those 21 teachers, seven teachers increased their scores by at least eight points from the pre to the post TORP. One teacher's score increased by 62 points, one by 25 points, one by 19 points, and the remaining teachers' score increases ranged from an increase of one point to 18 points. Eight teachers' scores decreased by a maximum of eight points down to just one point. The mean for the pre TORP was 82.45833 and the mean for the post TORP was 89.95238 which was a total increase of 7.49505 points. Although the individual scores did not increase a total of eight points as predicted, the mean score indicates that this projected outcome was nearly matched. The decrease in scores for the eight teachers was somewhat of a puzzle although statistically this small variation would be

expected on just two administrations of the scale.

Table 1

Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) Scores

Scores	Mean	Median	Mode
Teachers (n=24)			
Pre-Course	82.45833	81	80
Teachers (n=21)			
Post-Course	89.95238	91	99

2. Teachers will be asked to state their theory of reading at the beginning and at the end of implementation. By the end of the implementation period, it is expected that 12 out of 15 teachers' responses will reflect the current theory and research. An assessment of their theoretical shifts will be made using a rubric for scoring.

This outcome was met.

Again, the analysis must be made for 24 teachers. Initially, 15 out of the 24 teachers showed a mo[illegible]ate to strong evidence of an understanding of the reading process. It should be noted at this time that four of these 15 teachers were Reading Recovery trained and had already

been exposed to a great deal of the theory taught in this course. By the end of the course, 24 out of 24 demonstrated a moderate to strong understanding of the reading process. As rated by the rubric, initially nine of the 24 teachers showed little or no understanding of the reading process. The discussion centered on isolated skills more than around the process of reading. One explanation of such low scores could be that the teachers were not used to answering reflective types of questions and therefore misinterpreted the question.

Table 2

Theory of Reading Scores

Scores	Little or no evidence of Understanding of the Reading Process 0	Meager Evidence 1	Moderate Evidence 2	Substantial Evidence of Understanding of Reading Process 3
Teachers (n=24) Pre-Course	1	8	11	4
Teachers (n=24) Post-Course	0	0	5	19

3. Teachers will be asked to turn in a copy of their typical daily schedule in the beginning of implementation and again at the end. By the end of the implementation period, it is

expected that 12 out of 15 teachers' schedules will reflect the current research on time spent in literacy activities throughout the day. A rubric will be used to assess the relationship between theory and practice.

This outcome was not met.

Because of the amount of outside reading that was required in this course and because of the difficulty the teachers expressed in having adequate time to take the required number of running records to be graded, the writer decided not to ask the teachers to turn in their schedules. Evaluation was made informally.

4. Teachers will be asked to prepare and present a reading/writing project that reflects and understanding of current theory and research. Based upon a rubric, 12 out of 15 teachers will show substantial evidence of understanding of the reading process.

This outcome was met.

Twenty out of 24 teachers scored a high score of three on the rubric used to evaluate the oral presentations. This score indicated substantial evidence of understanding of the reading process. Four teachers out of the 24 scored two, or moderate evidence of understanding of the reading process.

Table 3

Reading/Writing Project Scores

Scores	Little or no Evidence of Understanding of the Reading Process 0	Meager Evidence 1	Moderate Evidence 2	Substantial Evidence of Understanding of Reading Process 3
Teachers (n=24)				
Oral Presentations	0	0	4	20

5. Teachers will be required to take weekly running records of reading over a period of three months for four students. It is expected that 12 out of 15 teachers can evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their students and to then write paragraphs describing these strengths and weaknesses. These records and evaluations will be evaluated for accuracy in scoring and interpretation using a checklist.

This outcome was met.

By the last class, all 24 teachers were able to evaluate a student's strengths and weaknesses as demonstrated by the running records they turned in on their students. The teachers also shared with the writer that they were now using running records in their classrooms on a regular basis and found therm invaluable when talkıng to parents about their children.

Discussion

Overall, the writer felt that this course was very successful and had a positive effect on

the 24 teachers enrolled in it. One of the biggest drawbacks was the size of the class. Because of the large number of teachers enrolled, everything took longer to present and analyze. Some of the teachers were very reticent to speak in such a large group and the writer did not always feel that everyone had a chance to ask questions and share. On the positive side, however, was the fact that so many teachers wanted to take the course and were willing to listen to ideas that were sometimes very disturbing and uncomfortable for them. Dr. Robert Young at the 1994 Annual National Association of Educators of Young Children spoke of teachers as ". . . the teachers who have taught 20 years and the ones who have taught one year 20 times." Some of the teachers in this class were the "one year 20 times" teachers to whom Dr. Young referred.

The writer attempted throughout the course to empower the teachers with the background knowledge to give them the confidence to make their own decisions based on the needs of their students rather than relying on a teacher's manual or a guidebook. As Regie Routman (1991) states, although teachers are trained in the methodology they are not trained in the ability to think and react as professionals. By attempting to empower the teachers through this course, the writer hoped to eradicate the teachers' fears of failure or inadequacy as J. David Cooper (1993) reported.

Although the TORP scores for 12 out of 15 or 20 out of 24 teachers did not increase by eight points each, the mean score went from 82.45 in September to 89.95 in December. One teacher's score jumped from the lowest in the class, 60 points, to the highest in the class, 112 points. Most teachers gained an average of seven and one half points in 12 weeks time and that was significant. Given additional time for the class or for follow-up visits, the writer would expect a high rate of implementation of the ideas and practices introduced in the class. Twelve

weeks was not enough time for the teachers to learn the theory and practices and to incorporate them into their daily schedules. As each week went by, the teachers always came to class telling about their latest attempts and failures. The other teachers were always quick to jump in and offer their personal experiences and to offer suggestions. It was powerful to watch the teachers begin to collaborate. The writer was only setting the stage for implementation; the teachers were the practitioners. Sometimes the writer did not have an answer for the teachers' frustrations or failures. Several times the writer left the class promising to have an answer by the next class and then making many phone calls and rereading chapters to find that answer.

The teachers' stated theories of reading at the beginning of the class reflected their individual scores on the TORP. They were, for the most part, very sequential and structured with little noted reference to the current theories of reading and writing. By the end of the course almost every teacher reflected a clear and significant understanding of the theory. For many, the idea of reading readiness was ingrained in their thinking. For those teachers the understanding of the developmental stages of reading, writing, and spelling was a significant shift for them and for their definition of reading. As Duckworth (1991) pointed out, the key to getting these teachers to shift their thinking was to value the knowledge they brought to the course. And sometimes for the writer that was an arduous task! As Griffiths, Duncan, Ward, Hood, Hervey, and Bonalleack (1992) reported, it was difficult for the writer to make the teachers understand the importance of the link of writing to reading. Once that connection was made and valued, the task was made much simpler. Strickland's (1987) ideas were very helpful in making those links.

The writer made the decision not to require the teachers to turn in their daily schedules after realizing that the volume of the assignments was great enough both for the teachers and the

writer. Grading the various other assignments for 24 graduate students became overwhelming at times for the writer. However, many teachers did discuss with the writer, privately, ways to incorporate the ideas into their schedules and how to restructure their days. A fair amount of class discussion time was allowed for the teachers to share their ideas for scheduling the Cunningham four blocks and how to fit in shared reading and other procedures into those four blocks.

The reading and writing oral presentations were outstanding. The only drawback, again, was the size of the class. Each teacher was limited to only ten minutes but several went over and the writer did not wish to stop them. However, by the end of the two nights of presentations, everyone was tired. The last two or three presenters each night were very rushed and that was not positive after all of the work they had done. Perhaps scheduling the presentations over two nights and leaving the third night for the exam and for those who did not get to present on their night would be a better idea. With a large class, you would need that third night cushion to ensure adequate time for each. The presentations were excellent. The teachers made handouts for each member of the class with their suggested books and lesson plans so that each teacher left with a file of ideas to use in their classrooms. The writer and most of the class were introduced to some new Big Books and some exciting ideas from their colleagues.

One of the big surprises for the writer was how difficult it was for the teachers to learn to take a running record. This was a big eye opener. The whole idea was foreign to most of the teachers. These teachers were used to giving only the basal tests for assessing their students. When the writer pointed out the strengths and the weaknesses of the basal tests as compared to those of the running record, the teachers were quite surprised. One teacher came to class and

said, "Those running records really work! I got a new student the other day from out of state with no records. I took a running record and in less than ten minutes I knew exactly where he was reading." The first sets of running records that the teachers turned in were not accurate and showed a real lack of understanding of the procedure eventhough we had practiced taking them in class. The writer decided that running records would have to be practiced each class meeting in order for the teachers to have a firm understanding of the procedure. Each week the writer audiotaped one of her Reading Recovery students reading aloud. The text was duplicated so that the teachers each had a copy. The tape was played and each teacher took a running record as the writer took one on the overhead projector. The teachers were then able to check their work and ask any questions they had. As a group the records were analyzed. By the end of the course, all 24 teachers could take a running record and analyze it accurately.

This course became an instant success in the district. Teachers began calling by the end of the third week wanting to know when it would be offered again. The response was so overwhelming that a second class was added and began before this class was finished. The teachers' evaluations at the end of the course pointed to the practical ideas as one of the strengths of the course. Several pointed to the wealth of information the writer could share with them regarding the developmental stages of reading, writing, and spelling. Others pointed out the usefulness of the shared ideas with their colleagues. As Goldenberg (1991) so ably pointed out in looking at the success of the New Zealand literacy programs, supporting and training teachers leads to literacy acquisition for all students and that was the point of this practicum.

Recommendations

1. The teachers who took this course should have ongoing support to ensure their

continued success. A sharing group which meets periodically would be ideal. The writer should also be available for classroom visits to help clarify any confusions or to expand the teachers' thinking.

2. Building principals need to be informed of the content of this course so that they will have an understanding of what the teachers are trying to achieve and why. A follow-up course for administrators would be the ideal solution.

3. The class should be kept at 15 teachers to ensure that adequate time is available to assist the teachers and to adequately cover the content material.

4. A professional visit to a school using the Cunningham four block model should be incorporated into the course. The more teachers can observe, the better their understanding will be.

5. The class should meet 15 times a semester for three hours instead of 12 weeks for 3 3/4 hours. Shorter hours would help for those teachers and the writer who were very tired by the end of each class.

6. The course could run during summer school. That way the teachers and instructor would be fresh and relaxed. The only drawback would be that the teachers would not be able to try out the ideas in their classrooms.

Dissemination

The writer has shared the syllabus for the course with the two other Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders in her district and they are developing similar courses to handle the overwhelming demand that this course has brought for more sessions. Several other Reading Recovery colleagues across the state have asked for copies of the syllabus.

The writer submitted a proposal to present this practicum to a large regional literacy conference to be held early next year. The proposal has been accepted. A presentation is also planned for a state reading conference. That proposal has also been accepted.

An article concerning this course will be submitted to the Reading Recovery national newsletter for consideration. If accepted, it will be read by hundreds of Reading Recovery colleagues across the United States and Canada.

Word of mouth has been the most powerful form of communication of this practicum. Teachers across the district and out of the district have called asking to enroll in the course. Plans are already underway to offer the course next semester and in both sessions of summer school. Though the district has picked up the tab for tuition and books, teachers who are not employed in the district and some who are on the waiting list have shown their desire to pay their own tuition to take the course. That has been most gratifying for the writer.

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Appendix A

Checklist for Evaluating

Running Records

RUNNING RECORD CHECKLIST

_____Child's Name

_____Date of Record

_____Name of Text

_____Text Level

_____Accurate Running Record Notations

_____Accurate Number of Errors

_____Accurate Number of Self Corrections

_____Correct MSV

_____Correct Percentage

_____Correct Self Correction Rate

_____Complete Description of Cues Used and Cues Neglected

Explanation of Areas Not Checked as Complete or Accurate:_____

_____

_____

Additional Comments: _____

_____

_____

Appendix B

Scoring Rubric

SCORING RUBRIC

Little or no Evidence of Understanding of the Reading Process	Meager Evidence	Moderate Evidence	Substantial Evidence of Understanding of Reading Process
I	I	I	I
0	1	2	3